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To Pray and To Play: post-postmodern pilgrimage at Lourdes.

1.1 Introduction

Both the practice and the research of pilgrimage have undergone considerable change in the last few decades. The concept of pilgrimage has been extended from one of religious or spiritual inspiration to include many other quasi- and secular forms of tourism (Badone and Roseman, 2004; Shuo, Ryan and Liu, 2009), including inter-faith (Nyaupane, Timothy and Poudel, 2015), literary (Robertson and Radford, 2009), death and war (Dunkley, Morgan and Westwood, 2011; Hyde and Harman, 2011; MacConville, 2006; Hartig and Dunn, 1998), slavery (Yankholmes and McKercher, 2015) and sports centered activities (Ritchie and Adair, 2004; Gibson, Willming and Holdnak, 2003). Falling attendance at traditional, localised places of worship across all the major faiths (-31% attendance at Catholic Churches between 1990 and 2003 in the UK for example - Faithsurvey, 2017) has been mirrored by a rise in less traditional, individualistic engagement in postmodern touristic-pilgrimage activities to more distant locations (Damari and Mansfeld, 2016; Andriotis, 2011; Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Palmer and Gallagher, 2007; Reader, 2007; Badone and Roseman, 2004). Timothy and Olsen (2006) recognized this transference and noted that contemporary spirituality can now be characterised by experimentation and hybridisation. While religious and spiritual pilgrimage has long been a topic of academic study the shift in practice has been mirrored by a shift in research that has undergone a refocusing from the physical aspects of pilgrimage, and the intended structuration of the experiences of many, to the study of the qualia of the individual pilgrim (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). However, it is argued that this has resulted in an ironic fixation upon the 'tourist' and a dismissal of the 'pilgrim' and that there is a need to return to attempting to understand the pilgrim's religious identity (Feldman, 2017; Damari and Mansfeld, 2016).

This study recognizes this shift in practice and research focus, and attempts to further our understanding of the factors that individuals draw upon when constructing a personal meaning of their pilgrimage through a micro-ethnographic examination of the 'lived experiences' of twenty-four visitors to Lourdes.

It finds that a sense of communitas is formed around a common respect for the preservation and authenticity of Lourdes, and in navigating its spiritual and secular spaces, meaningful experiences are gained by both religious and touristic pilgrims. While the 'actual meanings' that individual visitors derive from their visit are as multitudinous and heterogeneous as the number of visitors themselves, there are several themes that pervade the stories that are

frequently told and retold, and thereby indicate the types of content that they draw upon when constructing their account of the meaning of their travels. These themes comprise deeply *'lived connections'* that the narrators have with the subject of the story, unexpected '*encounters*' whereby events unfolded that were outside the pre-visit expectations of the pilgrim, considerable *visual* content that may even include supernatural visions, and a degree of *curative* or healing and supportive content.

These themes are more than mere descriptions/characteristics of their told and retold lived experiences, they are hermeneutic reflections of the site of Lourdes and the apparition of the Virgin Mary. Thus, modern day pilgrims appear to re-experience the events that are said to have surrounded the appearance of the Virgin Mary to Bernadette Soubirous in 1858. It is these 'Echoes of Bernadette' that afford liminal experiences that are unfettered by the topological boundaries of the site and offer the pilgrim deep-rooted, authentic attachment to the religious and the historic. We proffer that the postmodern concept of pilgrimage as an individual's quest for meaning is incomplete and that contemporary pilgrimage may be conceived of as a post-postmodern search for spiritual meaning that is individually derived but is also rooted in an authentic past.

2.1 Pilgrimage

The early seminal literature in the study of pilgrimage and religious tourism places emphasis upon the objectivity (external and generalised) of the pilgrimage experience. Turner and Turner (1978) present pilgrimage as a liminoid phenomenon, reflecting earlier interpretations by van Gennep (1960) the French ethnographer and folklorist that view *"the overall sociological features of the community undergoing a liminal process, or, the sites themselves (location, characteristics and meaning)"* (Collins-Kreiner 2010, p7). The objectivity of early pilgrimage research presents a view of the activity, whether religious or touristic, that centralises the site as the object of significance. The work of Nolan and Nolan (1989) is perhaps the most obvious example that examines pilgrimage through a structured, external, objective and generalised lens. Their study presents the systematic inventory of some 6,150 pilgrimage shrines in Western Europe, providing the reader with statistical evidence of the growth patterns and wider communal implications of pilgrimage as both a homogenous activity and as a phenomenon that is dependent upon location.

The intermediate literature is punctuated by the work of Smith (1992), Stoddard (1996), Santos (2003) and the positions of Marnham (1980), Sallnow (1981), Eade and Sallnow (1991), Eade

(1991 & 1992) (competing discourses) and Reader and Walter (1993) (pilgrimage and popular culture) that are opposed to the Turnerian view that communitas is a central and unifying element of the process of pilgrimage. Marnham (1980), Cohen (1972 & 1974 & 1979), Urry (1990) and latterly the work of Badone and Roseman (2004) were part of an academic movement that advocated the 'Similarity Theory' between pilgrims and tourists (Andriotis 2011; Collins-Kreiner 2010; della Dora 2012; Palmer and Gallagher 2007; Poria, Airey and Butler 2003). Similarity Theory is based upon the view that postmodern travel negates the 'conceptual opposites' of pilgrims and tourists that was favoured by the early theorists and proponents of pilgrimage studies. It is Graburn (1977) who first presents the notion that the tourist was experiencing a parallel process with the pilgrim. He claims that both are 'metaphorically' taking part in a sacred journey that is about self-transformation, knowledge and status (Graburn, 1983). Eade's (1991) study claims that pilgrimage sites, in reality, are places of order, structure, power and conflict. Eade (1991), and the other proponents of anti-communitas, while not totally dismissive of the Turnerian (1978) thesis, support a position that place communitas as but one dimension of the pilgrimage experience. Smith's (1992) conceptual framework places tourists and pilgrims at opposing ends of a continuum of 'individual' motive and meaning on which one is able to 'artificially' delineate the pilgrim and tourist based upon measurable, conditioned and controlled points. He recognises that the pilgrim/tourist continuum, potentially at least, offers innumerable possibilities for sacred-secular combinations. This view is supported by Stoddard (1996) who puts forward a revised framework that creates a central 'intermediate' ground termed 'religious tourist'. The intermediate position is, according to Stoddard (1996), the result of two separated phenomena, tourism and pilgrimage, brought together in a central 'interacting' ground. It is this central ground, according to Santos (2003), where most pilgrims/tourists are situated.

2.1.2 Toward Personal Pilgrimage

The shift in practice of pilgrimage and realization of the importance of the individual in the construction of its meaning has been recognized (Reader, 2007; Timothy and Olsen, 2006), and some headway has been made in addressing the need to study the phenomena of individualistic pilgrimage. della Dora (2012) for instance makes an interesting study of pilgrim-tourists to Mount Athos and Meteora, garnering information primarily through the use of semi-structured interviews and open questionnaires, supplemented by visitors' books, travel blogs and photographs. The study attempts to "*gain insight into 'lived experiences'*" (p959) focusing specifically upon how the real and imaginary boundaries in the landscape of the region

preserve the sacred or let it be "*contaminated…by technological intrusions from the world"* (p971). The geography thus serves to differentiate and separate pilgrims, and their areas of pilgrimage, from tourists, and their areas of tourism. Andriotis (2011) examines the authenticity of pilgrimage to Mount Athos, employing participant observation and fieldnotes, noting how commercialization and mass tourism are seen to erode the religious authenticity of the location. Importantly, and citing Collins-Kreiner (2010), he also recognizes the importance of the individual in the perception of authenticity, that it is dependent upon their own unique and subjective perceptions. Later, Willson, MacIntosh and Zahar (2013) undertake a phenomenological study of a single spiritual-tourist's experiences of travelling to Peru (from a sample of several such tourists to various destinations). The approach, in allowing the individual to offer evidence that enables them to enunciate their thoughts and feelings, is found useful in revealing fascinating insight into the effect of the individual's wider life in their construction of positive and negative meaning from a journey, or from an event within a journey. Recently, Buzinde, Kalavar, Kohli and Manual-Navarette (2014) conduct focus groups with Kumbh Mela pilgrims in order to understand their motivations, actions and experiences. In contrast with the majority of prior studies they find no touristic motivation among pilgrims and suggest that pilgrims motives are driven by deeply spiritual devotions and a need to gain spiritual knowledge from religious elders and leaders. Also in contrast to the extant literature, especially in light of the presence of a "*pronounced level of social stratification*" (p15), there is a high degree of communitas, although discord seems to have been suspended rather than annihilated. Higgins and Hamilton's (2016) contemporary ethnographic work at Lourdes epitomises the importance of the individuals' pilgrimage experience when highlighting the 'mini-miracles' that may have a greater impact upon them than the officially recognised miracles of the Church. They identify the *physical*, *social* and *peaceful* forms that these events may take and the significance of the word-of-mouth sharing of these experiences between individuals that act as a driver for further pilgrimages.

These studies are most valuable in furthering our understanding of individuals, the interconnectedness of their lives and journeys (whether spiritual or touristic), the uniquely subjective nature of the meaning of travel, along with the value of adopting methods of study that elicit the necessary insight into those individuals. However, there is a need to take heed of contemporary literature that points out that much of the postmodern research has lost sight of the pilgrim. Wilson, McIntosh and Zahra (2013) remind us that the spiritual dimension of tourism still remains under researched and has in fact tended to fetishize and reify the touristic

dimension of pilgrimage to the detriment of the spiritual to such a degree that the 'pilgrim' in pilgrim-tourism research is "rarely mentioned" (Feldman, 2017). Inspired by these works, and in order to address Collins-Kreiner's (2010) observations of the gap in the current literature, this study aims to focus its epistemological gaze toward exploring the experiences that individuals draw upon when constructing personal meaning of their visit to Lourdes.

2.2 Methodology

In support of choosing Lourdes as a suitable research landscape for this study it is significant that it is one of the few Marian sites to be authenticated by the Catholic Church (sites that have developed in response to miraculous apparitions of the Virgin Mary). The site developed as a pilgrimage center in response to eighteen apparitions of the Virgin Mary to a local peasant girl named Bernadette Soubirous between February 11th and July 16^{th,} 1858. It is now the most visited (Lourdes, 2016) and probably the most important of the Marian shrines for the European and indeed the international Catholic pilgrim community. There are an estimated 155 million visitors to pilgrimage sites around the world per annum (Arcworld, 2017) and around 4 to 6 million of these visit Lourdes each year (Sacredsites, 2017). The site has seen significant growth in the last twenty years as the Catholic Church actively promotes it as a pilgrimage centre and not just a shrine as a means of *"restating the Catholic Church's authority in a secularising age"* (Reader 2007, p219). It is a notable place of division, contradictions and complexity as pilgrims and secular tourists come together with multi-layered and multifaceted motivations for visiting (Gesler, 1996). Lourdes's historic, religious, social and economic significance as a pilgrimage site, as well as being the context for several seminal research studies (Eade 1991, 1992), validates it as an appropriate research topography capable of advancing empirical understandings in the pursuit of generating new theories of the pilgrim.

2.2.1 Data Capture

This study adopts a micro-ethnographic approach (Fetterman, 2010) eliciting both *'in the moment'* and reflective biographical data from visitors' 'lived experiences' participating at Lourdes (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Blumer, 1969). Crotty (1998) suggests that empirical data unearthed in this way should display a culturally derived historically situated interpretation of the 'social life- world' from which accurate theoretical concepts can inductively emerge. Therefore, individual meanings and values captured through a lived experience becomes the foundation of the interpretivist's nature of enquiry (Weber, 1970). This is because 'the goal of this tradition is to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of

those who live it' (Schwandt, 1994, p118). Following the lead of Blumer (1969, p39) the study's methods aimed to 'lift the veils that cover the area of group life that one proposes to study' by getting as close as possible to the lived experience of those involved.

In keeping with similar works in the field, such as Buzinde et al (2014), the lead researcher 'took up residence' for the entire eight days of an established Diocesan pilgrimage at Lourdes during the pinnacle of the pilgrimage season (a diocese being a region that is under the care of a Bishop). During this period the researcher was fully immersed in all group activity (official and social), recording the 'life' of the pilgrims through participation, observation, and conversation with other visitors, that were both religious and touristic (Samuel & Pettie, 2016; Charmaz 2014). This process ensured that the research was carried out sympathetic to the religious sensitivity and cultural norms of Lourdes's physical and metaphysical topography (Buzinde et al., 2014; Grbich 2013 Maxwell 2013).

The time was spent with a group of twenty-five people, one of several such groups, from the total Diocesan population of six hundred. The group comprised twenty-four pilgrims and an official leader (Priest), who acted as the guide, coordinator, confidante, director, and link to the wider Diocesan management and formal itinerary of the pilgrimage (for details of the itinerary see Table 1). The twenty-four pilgrims were from a range of social and demographic backgrounds and had previously visited Lourdes a number of times; one was undertaking his first visit, ten others had visited multiple times, seven had visited more than ten times and a further seven had visited more than fifteen times each.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Informal interviews were developed and used to explore and contextualise what the Diocesan group observed and experienced (Fetterman, 2010; Kutshce 1998). Conversations with participants were not pre-determined or structured but developed organically to address the aim of this research: conversations were typically initiated with questions about 'how and why have you journeyed here?' whereas many of the interactions unfolded without prompting and required the researcher to act as an observer and scribe. The nature of some interactions was shaped by the activities that were prescribed in the itinerary. For example, the daily processions at 5pm and 9pm afforded opportunities to immerse oneself among the pilgrims on one day and mingle among the observant visitors the next. Thus, observations were made not only of the pilgrim-tourist divide, but from within both sides of it. Interactions took place in the Shrine,

Grotto and Basilica as well as in the streets, cafes and hotels of the area, as the stories and experiences of the pilgrims unfolded.

Discussions, utterances and observations were recorded, as they occurred, in a series of fieldnotes (Paolisso and Hames, 2010), a method that has been used in similar studies such as Andriotis (2011), and longer discussions were recorded on a dictaphone. The fieldnotes were used to inform the reflexive development of further lines of enquiry (Halcomb and Davidson, 2006; Lynch, 2000; Schwartz and Schwartz, 1955) and were a rich source of data that were drawn upon during the analysis. While the focus of the study is the Diocesan group, the data were captured via convenience sampling (Jennings, 2001) and reflects their experiences and interactions with other visitors to Lourdes. Consequently, the analysis is made upon their actions and reactions toward a variety of interactions and experiences, as well as the stories and experiences of those with whom the Diocesan group interacted (participant demographics and locations are identified throughout the analyses). The immersive approach enabled conversations to incrementally evolve, becoming more varied and deeper as the researcher became increasingly closer and intimate with the group (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1988). This paper is subsequently built upon empirical data that captured the lived experiences of Lourdes pilgrims and transformed them into *'textual expressions'* (Van Manen, 1990, p36).

Maintaining reliability and validity within interpretive research is a subject of much discussion (Miles 1979). Some argue that it is achieved through adherence to declared-in-advance process (Whittemore et al., 2001; Gronhaug and Olson, 1999) while others note the rise in the use of reflective assessment (Maton, 2003; Finlay, 2002). By detailing the research landscape, approach and spiritual position of the study we endeavor to imbue this work with a degree of 'recoverability' that "*will help to justify the generalization and transferability*" (Checkland and Holwell, 1998, p17).

The data were thematically analysed (Guest, Macqueen and Namey, 2012) to identify dominant and emergent topics in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase approach comprising, (1) data familiarisation, (2) initial interpretation, (3) identification of themes, (4) collectively reviewing and agreeing themes, (5) defining and naming those dominant themes and (6) construction of the narrative of the analysis. In phase 1 the fieldnotes and recordings of interviews were transcribed by the lead researcher in order to minimize misinterpretation (Opdenakker, 2006) before being independently reviewed by each member of the research team: salient points (phase 2) and dominant themes (phase 3) were manually colour coded.

Table 2 details the thematic codings that were identified by each researcher, then cross-compared, before the final interpretations were member-validated (Sandelowski, 1993). Phase 2 presents the initial codes of each researcher along with salient quotations upon which they were based. In Phase 3 the major themes are shown that each researcher developed: for example, Researcher C identifies 'wheelchairs' and 'the sick' as belonging to the major theme 'Sick' and differentiates these from 'bereaved' and 'sad' that belong to the major theme 'Tragedy'. Phase 4 arranges the major themes of each researcher according to common type: for example, Researcher A's major themes of 'Gateway' and 'Spaces' both reflect the physical and metaphysical topography of Lourdes, and resemble the major themes of 'Many Places' and 'Interactions' of Researcher B, and 'Physical Separation' of Researcher C. Phase 5 depicts the final themes that were derived upon which the narrative is built (Phase 6); the overarching metatheme of 'The Pilgrimage Journey' becoming the first section of the analyses and which examines the events of the pilgrimage to Lourdes, along with the analytical themes of 'lived connections', 'encounters', 'visual' and 'curative' that structure the analysis of the told and retold stories of the pilgrims.

The research team comprise theistic and atheistic individuals, and this facilitated both the contextually nuanced interpretation of the research landscape and the dispassionate analysis of primary data. The findings and themes are thereby directly built from hermeneutical representations of the structural experiences (Damari and Mansfield, 2016; Van Manen, 1990) and the social contexts of the participants' world (Blumer, 1969). Verbatim statements are used throughout the analysis in order to offer an unfettered substantiation of pertinent findings and are accompanied by summary characteristics of the respondent including age and gender.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

Ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality is a foundation of ethical research (Duclos, 2017). This study employed fully informed consent whereby each participant in the Diocesan group was provided with a 'statement of intent' that detailed how and why the study was being conducted: gaining informed consent in ethnography can be particularly problematic since the range of interactions and individuals that can become involved are innumerable (Li, 2008; Burgess, 2007; Thorne, 1980). Verbal consent was obtained from participants that were not part of the Diocesan group when they were interviewed directly. In all instances, pseudonyms have been used in order to retain anonymity (van den Hoonard, 2003). Permission was granted to identify the pilgrim group's Diocese but the researchers have chosen not to reveal this in order to ensure confidentiality.

2.3 Findings and Analysis

2.3.1 Meta Theme: The Pilgrimage Journey

> "*If you take ten pilgrims you'll find ten motivations for them: from those that are going because they want to pray, from those that are going because they are looking for a cure, to those that are going because their mates persuaded them.*"
> [Andrew, 40+, Priest & Diocesan Leader, Interview]

As much of the seminal literature has indicated, there are many visitors to Lourdes whose motivations vary widely. Tourists mingle amiably with the pious, some standing agog while others squint less severely at the dazzle of the plastic grottos and figurines that adorn the streets of the village (Swanson and Timothy, 2012) and successfully separate "*the sacred and the profane forces*" (Damari and Mansfield, 2016, p203),

> *You do see a lot of tourists in Lourdes and for some of them it is a shock to see some very severely handicapped people...sometimes the tourists are quite emotional with it all.*
> [Barry, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]
>
> *If you truly believe in it and you have faith...this is not sacred…why would you come here?*
> [Alice, 50+, Tourist]
>
> *...but there will be Catholics who are skeptics and you don't have to believe in Lourdes to be a Catholic,*
> [Christopher, 40+, Priest, Interview]

Diocesan groups surge back and forth through the crowds as they attempt to keep pace with their ambitious itineraries. Solitary men sit in the Pari Mutuel Urbains, their eyes fixed upon the horses racing on the screens, hoping that their bet will finish first, while outside, the weak and the feeble slowly navigate the tide of people hoping that their race is not yet run.

Yet, while picturing these visitors as occupying some position along a pilgrim-tourist divide is conceptually useful, to arrange them according to rigid types would be incorrect. Their motivations and expectations, in contrast to Buzinde et al's. (2014) findings that pilgrims have no need to fulfill tourist desires, are not just varied (Badone and Roseman, 2004; Smith, 1992; Shou Ryan and Lui, 2009) but they are also varying, comprising touristic dimensions and religious dimensions in degrees that differ over the course of a day as well as over the course of their duration of stay. These observations reflect Eade's (1992) suggestion that the meanings that visitors to Lourdes construct are deeply personal and rooted in their very own heterogeneity. One of a group of returning university students that had formerly been assistants at the site captured the multifaceted nature of pilgrimage when he said,

Why do we come to Lourdes, that is simple, to pray and to play.
[Lee, 20+, Returning pilgrim, Interview]

The expectation that one should 'take part' when visiting Lourdes provides a template that would seem to encourage a Turnerian (1978) communitas. Throughout the event the pilgrims mentioned the role of the Church as the owner and creator of the formal pilgrimage experience. It was seen as the dominant and controlling body, shaping what place and rituals should be observed, and how they should be interpreted,

There are social aspects but there are religious observances some people may not like.

...but you are expected to take part in it...

...and quite frankly some people cannot stand it...
[Derek, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

However, contrary to what a less immersive study may conclude, many of the pilgrims expressed this as merely an element of their personal religious duty, albeit an occasionally exhausting one,

If you kind of go on the occasional Sunday you are now talking about a six or seven day stint which is a lot of devotion.
[Derek, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

Several members of our group pictured the itinerary almost as if it were a recipe for achieving their personal goals and hopes. It comprised only a fraction of their sphere of activities and did not appear to have any significant negative effect upon their overall perceptions of the experiences. In their eyes, the events could be selected and attended almost at will, providing it promised to satisfy some personal desire or need and, often more importantly, it was within the means of one's physical and mental capabilities,

...and I just say to people that is part of it, and if you are not up for it? Then…
[Eric, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

Some even emphasized that Lourdes itself, its apparitions and claimed curative powers, was not a necessary part of their Catholic faith,

...it's not a doctrine, it's an optional extra.

You can't be thrown out of the Catholic church for saying I do not believe that Mary appeared at Lourdes.
[Dale, 40+, Priest, Interview]

This observation reflects much of the current research on pilgrimage that identifies that although the church is still a key feature of the collective pilgrimage landscape it is no longer the critical influencer of individuals' perceptions. Rather, it is the pilgrim that subjectively

marks the site and its events that are both beyond the immediate gaze and beyond the Church's control (Higgins and Hamilton, 2016; Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Poria *et al*, 2003).

However, there is also an indication that the sociohistorical 'truth' of the site, that has undoubtedly been maintained through the Church's controlling influence, is a key part of many pilgrims' experiences. Even though the itinerary may be something of a 'pick and mix' of activities it appears that the authenticity of those activities and where they are enacted is very important,

> *...on balance yes I do believe Mary appeared at Lourdes...I have thought about it lots and now I have been here I am satisfied that Bernadette did see her, that she did speak, so yes I do believe in the story.*
> [Frank, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]
>
> *...(we) accept it...this is an authentic site.*
> [Brenda, 30+, Diocesan Group Member]

The authenticity of the activities is also underpinned, for some, by the presence of someone whom is perceived to be a spiritually authoritative or knowledgeable figure. These differ from the brancardier (literally a 'stretcher-bearer', but generally an assistant) that are formally employed by the Church to assist within the inner sanctum,

> *It is a prescriptive church with certain rituals, people who are very much in charge and want you to know who they are.*
> [Grant, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Grotto]

Instead, they are seen as enablers of personal pilgrimage that remain truthful to the purpose of the site. This resembles Buzinde, Kalavar, Kohli and Manual-Navarette's (2014) observation of the 'need' for spiritual leaders and elders, and as Damari and Mansfield (2016, p205) also noted "*keeping the pilgrim within the bounds of the sacred domain requires the path is drawn by religious people*". This was echoed among the conversations at Lourdes,

> *...picking up the threads for everyday life...pulling it all together...that is what a good pilgrimage director will do...that is what we are taught to do...that is what a tour operator cannot do...not the same as a Priest.*
>
> *On other pilgrimages again that advertise in the religious press which are basically package holiday firms with a religious spin – the people who go on those will not know each other and there's probably going to be less coherence beyond the general desire to visit that country or that particular shrine on the tour.*
> [Harry, 40+, Priest, Interview]

What the itinerary in Table 1 does not depict is the 'free time' that is cordially enjoyed by everyone after the events of the day. It is also a time where a great deal of self- and group-reflection take place and the rigors of the itinerary are considered alongside the spiritual

enrichment of the experiences. It is during these instances that these knowledgeable figures play an important role,

> *...the helpful thing that will happen normally is groups again that meet will have post-mortems.*
> [Ian, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim]

Evidence of communitas can be seen at Lourdes; both at the Grotto where pilgrims interact on a spiritual level and in the bars where pilgrims, tourists and local residents interact in a temporal and transitory existence. It is at this juncture where, not only do tourists and pilgrims come into close contact in shared places, but many pilgrims become tourists, or at least more tourist-like and exhibit greater similarities than differences (Santos, 2003; Stoddard, 1996; Graburn, 1977). Thus, the contestation of space, albeit imperfect, becomes minimized as the various visitors share in a more common purpose and a wider sense of communitas is fostered,

> *…there is actually a lot of inter-mixing, tourists there perhaps with no religious belief.*
> [Frank, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

With some non-religious visitors even appearing to defend the sanctity of the area on behalf of the pious,

> *If you truly believe in it and you have the faith it shouldn't be commercialised and hyped up and money made out of it like it is...there's nothing sacred or special anymore...*
> [Clare, 50+, Tourist]

Almost all of these encounters were punctuated with the telling of stories, and the evenings especially became grand orations as events, old and new, were shared. Pilgrims and tourists alike, remark upon the spectacle of such an enormous event and the emotional effect that it has had upon them,

> *I remember the first time, going up toward St Peters and seeing the people, and you are now part of this massive outfit.*
>
> *You get a tremendous boost now of not being this very quiet minority, saying 'well I go to church' and you are actually able to walk about…it's quite energising.*
> [Jim, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim]

Some tourists are dismayed at the commercialization of the area but still return,

> *It stuns me every time I come here...It is like Blackpool with Crucifixes.*
> [Diane, 40+, Tourist]

Meanwhile, the pilgrims are drawn by something deeper,

> *...why do people still come to Lourdes...because Mary asks them to, because we trust in Mary, because of the pull of Mary.*

[Andrew, 40+, Priest & Diocesan Leader, Interview]

There is perhaps a sense within the contemporary literature that postmodern pilgrimage has witnessed, or at least a focused upon, the movement of 'the pilgrim' toward 'the tourist' to occupy a middle-ground (Santos, 2003; Stoddard, 1996). However, our findings suggest that there is an equal but opposite movement of 'the tourist' toward 'the pilgrim' whereupon non-religious visitors display concern for the spiritual integrity of the pilgrimage site. Collectively, they both appear to share a common respect for the preservation and authenticity of Lourdes and thereby a sense of communitas is engendered.

2.3.2 Analytical Themes

After the excitement and turmoil of the trip passed and the objectivity of desk research held sway once more, the startling similarities between many of the observed accounts became apparent. Each contained, to some degree, characteristics that we have identified as 'Lived Connections', 'Encounters', 'Visual' and 'Curative'.

'Lived Connections'

Many of the stories and experiences that were relayed to us comprised accounts of interactions with other individuals that centre upon, but are not limited to, the physical space of Lourdes. These had often occurred that very day, the chronological, physical and personal proximity of the encounter (the accounts usually include the first names of individuals) seeming to add credence to the event. It may also be significant that many stories centre upon the experiences of non-religious individuals and their liminal awakenings.

For instance, one member of the group who had made numerous Pilgrimages to Lourdes told his story of Pedr Clarke many times, to many different people, during our stay. His account tells of his friend Kevin who witnessed a miraculous event,

> *My friend Kevin was in the same hotel, the Astoria, as Pedr Clarke and apparently he was singing in his wheelchair the night before.*
>
> *Pedr Clarke went to his room and his feet started shaking, twitching.*
>
> *The following morning he walked down to the Grotto.*
>
> [Harold, 70+, Diocesan Group Member]

Interestingly, this account resembles several others that were heard being told, and retold, among the Lourdes visitors throughout the duration of the fieldwork. Often the names were changed and some details were subtly altered, but the basic event remained the same: a surprising and miraculous event takes place upon someone that is personally, or closely known to the narrator.

One non-religious visitor, Jason 60+, who had only been encouraged to visit Lourdes by his religious wife, experienced a spiritual catharsis upon a chance meeting with a mother and her child that also contained an important physical element. After being approached by the mother who was loudly exclaiming that her daughter had been healed by her visit to the grotto that day,

> *I knelt down in front of this little girl and said "can I shake your hand" and so she put her hand out. So I shook her hand and put my other hand on her head.*
>
> [Jason, 60+, Non-religious visitor, Interview]

Even more profound perhaps is the experience of the man who happened to befriend the Duchess of Kent during one of his visits to Lourdes following the death of his wife. The highly personal nature of the encounter, as Wilson, McIntosh and Zahra's (2013) work suggests is important in the development of meaningful memory, is exhibited by the physical proximity of the narrator to the Duchess of Kent throughout the story, and in the way that the Duchess remembers and uses the narrator's first name many years after their first meeting,

> *This lady all dressed in white…no earrings, no make-up on, just plain… she turned around and I remember her distinctly saying and pointing to the seat beside me.*
>
> *Do you know she came back two years later. I got myself sat where she could see me and she walked over and almost missed me and then spotted me and said "Keith, is it you".*
>
> [Keith, 80+, Diocesan Group Member]

'Encounters'

The accounts of both Pilgrims and visitors also include strong elements of surprise and astonishment within the encounters they had. Our male, 60+, non-religious visitor initially conveyed surprise that he is actually at Lourdes, having been encouraged, he may have even said coerced, into visiting by his religious spouse. He is also startled by the actual encounter itself, the woman and child suddenly appeared before him claiming a miracle had happened while he was merely walking about the town, and also stunned at the effect that this had upon his spirituality,

> *I know this may seem like a silly thing to say but I said "God bless you" – and then instantly I realised he already had.*
>
> [Jason, 60+, Non-religious visitor, Interview]

He appeared visibly shaken by the event as he conveyed his experience to our group, and then to others in the hotel, and was seen to spend less time by himself over the remainder of the stay.

While the story of Pedr Clarke tells of his amazement at his own physical transformation that had taken place to him during his stay, for "[He] *kept stopping and looking at himself in shop windows not believing that it was him walking",* it is the reactions of some of the Diocesan group members and the storyteller that are equally notable. The narrator was animated in his rendition of the story and several people that had not heard it before nodded appreciatively. However, several returning pilgrims had heard the story many times previously and they interjected to reaffirm key points. Whereas the disparity in the details of these accounts could be interpreted to undermine their authenticity, instead, their multiple origins seemed to substantiate them. An elderly member of the Diocese even commented,

> *I know this story, it's true.*
>
> *I heard it many years ago…but it wasn't about Pedr Clarke. If my memory serves me right it was a lady who experienced the miracle and was amazed to be walking again…*
>
> [Nancy, 80+, Diocesan Group Member]

The narrative of the Pilgrim whom met the Duchess of Kent is also startling in many ways. Not only did he meet her after travelling in the wild hope of seeing her, but a very personal exchange took place,

> *She turned around and said "get closer to me" – well I was trembling with fear.*
> [Keith, 80+, Diocesan Group Member]

Further to this they continued their correspondence over many years,

> *She threw her arms around me and she made me promise faithfully that I would continue to write to her, and she gave me her address...and I wrote to her.*
> [Keith, 80+, Diocesan Group Member]

Their chance meeting many years later at Tarbes-Lourdes airport also seems to act as some form of consolidation of the interpretation that the events were not merely coincidence but were in some way ordained.

'Visual'

All of the stories that were told and retold also contained some powerful and moving imagery.

Many emphasized the importance (for them) of seeing the physical elements of the site,

> *You are going to get a lot of visitors from the Catholic world visiting Catholic sites maybe because they may see a Catholic Bishop or whatever.*
>
> [Moira, 50+ Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

The ceremonial aspects of Lourdes are seen by many to be the most instantly significant and memorable part of their visit,

> *There is the torchlight in the evening, the big procession which is magnificent.*
> [Len, 60+, Diocesan Group Member]

However, for others, the physical trappings of the Catholic Church can be a problem to see,

> *I just can't understand it here, it all seems to be big candles, big processions.. that shouldn't be what it's about*
> [Mark, 30+ Tourist]

Many of the topics of discussion among pilgrims and tourists incorporated some aspect of infirmity and cure. For instance, the encounter between the non-religious Visitor and the mother and daughter begins with him,

> *…watching the wheelchairs being taken down by the youth into St Joseph's Chapel.*
> [Jason, 60+, Non-religious visitor, Interview]

This is a significant feature for both the religious pilgrims and the tourists and one that frequently arises during discussions. One returning tourist remarked,

> *You do see a lot of tourists in Lourdes and for some of them it is a shock to see some very severely handicapped people*
> [Sid, 40+, Tourist]

This is an evocative scene that resonates with the historical and spiritual importance of Lourdes as a site for healing. In a similar manner, the recounting of the appearance of the Duchess of Kent as "*all dressed in white, no earrings, no makeup, just plain*" resembles an avatar of the Virgin Mary that had been seen by Bernadette in 1858.

It is however the story of Pedr Clarke that contains the most startling supernatural and visual content and resembles the mini-miracles that Lourdes has become most famous for (Higgins and Hamilton, 2016). During the night when his "*feet started shaking, twitching*",

> *There was a picture or a photograph of Our Lady or Bernadette that started to light up.*
>
> *I saw the face of the Devil and it was terrible, horrible...and I also saw the face of Our Lady...and gradually the face of the Devil faded and the face of Our Lady shone through him.*
> [Harold, 70+, Diocesan Group Member]

While the day to day sights of Lourdes are clearly important hallmarks of an authentic pilgrimage for many, it is, once again, the visual content of stories that are told and retold that resurface as the key components of individual's experiences. For a very small few, these may be witnessed at first hand, such as the man that met the Duchess of Kent. But for many, these

are experienced third hand through stories such as that of Pedr Clarke. As explored previously, it is the retelling of these stories, often with changes in important details, that, through their retelling act as confirmations of their authenticity.

'Curative'

Perhaps unsurprisingly for this location, the narratives were peppered with accounts of tragedy, hope and miraculous cures,

> *Is it a desperate belief that brings you here, because you are that ill?*
> [Jan, 40+, Tourist]
>
> *...to look after handicapped people that is the central bit of Lourdes.*
> [Oscar, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]

The bereaved Pilgrim whom met the Duchess of Kent mentioned,

> [I have]*...been coming here for thirty-seven years, every year, even when my wife died I came out on my own for twelve weeks.*
>
> *I sat with her for two hours and she had me crying my heart out going through the process of the loss of a loved one.*
> [Keith, 80+, Diocesan Group Member]

The scene that is depicted by Jason the 60+, non-religious visitor, even combines both of these elements by situating the story of a miraculous cure alongside a "*wheelchair procession*". It must be noted however, just as some question the authenticity of the Marian apparitions, there are many pilgrims that are doubtful of the historical claims of cures,

> *In 1928 there was alleged to have been a cure, and there are stories from 1858 onwards, I'll be totally honest in saying that I am a little bit skeptical about those in terms of scientific and medical knowledge at the time, and whether people in the fuller sense were actually cured.*
> [Oscar, 50+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim, Interview]
>
> *Because of the advance of medical science, the standard of proof that they set, that the healing has to be inexplicable, the more medicine knows the harder it is to show something is still inexplicable.*
> [Robert, 40+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim]
>
> *I think it may (Lourdes) have got caught up in a contemporary thing – you know a bit like the Spa thing.*
> [Steven, 60+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim]

For others, even seasoned pilgrims, the sight and symbols of decrepitude are overbearing,

> *Rather bizarrely they had hundreds of crutches hanging up in the Grotto.*
> [Terrence, 40+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim]

These findings resonate with Higgins and Hamilton (2016) and Gessler's (1996) observations that Lourdes is a place where physical, mental, behavioral and spiritual healing takes place.

Despite the presence of doubt in many, it cannot be argued that it is the belief and hope of cure, even if only of others, or only temporary (as identified by Higgins and Hamilton, 2016), that makes a significant mark upon the experiences of all that spend time at Lourdes.

2.4 Authenticity: Echoes of Bernadette

While each of the four analytical themes identified above are of interest in isolation by marking those experiences that are meaningful to the pilgrims, collectively they point towards the importance of the sociohistorical authenticity of the site. Through their own experiences, and through the stories of others, modern day pilgrims appear to re-experience the events that are said to have surrounded the appearance of the Virgin Mary to Bernadette Soubirous in 1858. Subjectively substantiating and perpetuating the Marian message is the common connection that appears essential among these pilgrims in what we term 'Echoes of Bernadette'.

We draw upon the Church's historical account of Bernadette in order to highlight the parallels with many of the modern stories that were encountered. Firstly, the Virgin Mary made herself known only to Bernadette, for she appeared to no other person nor could be seen by those that were with her at the time. This, coupled with repeated visitations over a period of five months, gives rise to an intensely personal experience for Bernadette. In many of our discussions the experiences are characterized by deeply personal, physical encounters. For example, the male, 60+, non-religious visitor's spiritual catharsis that occurs between himself and the girl while he places his hand upon her. Other stories emphasise the temporal nature of the encounter, such as Pedr Clark's nightmares that extend over the duration of his visit, while the bereaved Pilgrim's contact spans several years.

Bernadette's obvious surprise at the apparition was mirrored by the townsfolk and the Church's astonishment and disbelief upon hearing her claims. Our pilgrims and other visitors experienced similar surprise at their own encounters, and they also relate the surprise of those around them. For instance, a lady at Pedr Clark's hotel rushed in excitedly and exclaimed "*there's been a miracle*", as was Kevin's own surprise when he was later handed a newspaper clipping about the incident that "*by the time I got it, it had been photocopied and photocopied and photocopied".*

The visual manifestation of the Virgin Mary to Bernadette is also vivid and dramatic, for '*there came a dazzling light and a white figure'*. Most obviously, this is once again reflected in Pedr Clark's "*photograph of Our Lady or Bernadette that started to light up*", but perhaps most

startlingly in the bereaved Pilgrim's image of the Duchess of Kent "*all dressed in white…no earrings, no make-up on, just plain".*

The curative dimension of the storytellers' accounts is, as we have previously iterated, not surprising, but is in fact only loosely grounded in the historical details of Bernadette's own story. The Virgin Mary did not explicitly state that the spring water would cure the sick, however, she did command that the waters be taken (as well as a herb be eaten). A friend of Bernadette's was later said to have cured her dislocated arm by plunging it into the water after Bernadette had made them run clear by placing the mud in her mouth. Despite this, the spring remains a fundamental aspect of the site, to the degree that it features as a liminal gateway that is not necessarily concerned with healing. Some perceive of it giving hope and succor,

> *If there is a God that answers prayer, then now is the time, to grant a healing, but quite often to give peace of mind, or of a sense of direction or consolation to someone.*
> [Dale, 40+, Priest, Interview]

In fact, it may be considered, at least by some, to be more important as a tangible connection with their faith, or '*something deistic'* (Higgins and Hamilton, 2016, p29*)*, than it is as a curative device,

> *The fact that, that spring was discovered at the direction of Bernadette through the vision, makes it an integral element of the healing, whereas there are plenty of shrines, even in Wales, where a well is said to have healing properties, but, there are not many places where a well has been discovered in the context of a message from God pointing out where the water is.*
> [Dale, 40+, Priest, Interview]

> *When you go into the waters, for me, it is more the uplift, it's more the mystical appearance of your faith.*
> [Vernon, 60+, Regular church attendee and experienced pilgrim]

Previously, emphasis has been put upon the Church's management of the spiritual geography of pilgrimage to Lourdes, that is, the inner sanctum etc. Undoubtedly, for some, a liminoid experience occurs in this inner sanctum, particularly if a miracle is witnessed or happens upon the individual. However, the liminoid space appears not to be constrained by the historically determined and claimed space that comprise the spring and the surrounding area and basilica, but extends beyond the sacred space and into the secular space of the tourist and casual visitor. Our research advances Buzinde et al's. (2014) findings that pilgrims' motives for participation are directly related to events that take place on site and suggests that such transformative experiences can occur in any place, at any time and to anyone in a place that they deem is connected with their activity of 'visiting Lourdes'. In keeping with Willson, MacIntosh and

Zahar's (2013) findings, these events that occur within the journey are significant in the construction of the individual's meaning of their pilgrimage, through a process of self- and group-reflection (Bosangit, Hibbert and McCabe (2015). What appears important for many pilgrims is that these transformative experiences are rooted in their quest to attain spiritual knowledge (Buzinde et al. 2014) and, similar to Higgins and Hamilton's (2016) recognition of the importance of word-of-mouth storytelling, they are carried through the narratives and experiences of others, which in this study are found to contain repeated references to the sociohistorical 'authenticity' of the site and its connection with St Bernadette and the Virgin Mary. It is by this means that the liminal capabilities of the site are carried within and without the inner sanctum and afford meaningful pilgrimage to those that are unable to partake in the physical act of taking the waters, and even to those that were not deliberately seeking to make a spiritual pilgrimage.

Can it therefore be said that when visitors to Lourdes are constructing their own meaning of pilgrimage that they are drawing heavily upon the experiences of others who are contemporary avatars of Bernadette?

3.0 Conclusion

Pilgrimage is a constantly evolving term and practice, moving from purely religious origins to include secular pastimes and activities (Badone and Roseman, 2004). The early work of van Gennep (1960) and Turner and Turner (1978) for example, considered pilgrimage as a liminoid and transformative experience of the many. In this era, it was the nature of the activity that placed the physical site as the object of pilgrimage and differentiated the sacred from secular tourism. It is the work of Sallnow (1981), Eade (1991 & 1992), Smith (1992) among others, that begins to deconstruct the notion of pilgrimage as a singular sequence of events that results in commonly-acquired experience. This postmodern phase of pilgrimage research recognizes the blurred boundaries between religious and secular tourism and questions the significance of rigid, ritualized pilgrimage in the construction of personal meaning of the experience. Accompanying this shift there has been a concomitant change in the focus and methods of research that have been employed. Nolan and Nolan's (1989) large-scale survey of pilgrim experiences for example has given way to the more contextually rich examinations of Dunkley, Morgan and Westwood (2011), Hyde and Harman (2011), Andriotis (2011), Buzinde *et al* (2014), della Dora, (2012), Hughes, Bond and Ballantyne (2013), Willson *et al* (2013) and Higgins and Hamilton (2016).

This paper endeavors to contribute to the emerging need for research that focuses upon the qualia of the individual in the performance of their pilgrimage since we have 'lost sight of the Pilgrim' in pilgrimage-tourism research (Feldman, 2017; Damari and Mansfeld, 2016; Collin-Kreiner, 2010). In responding to this we expected to advance the postmodernist viewpoint that rejects collective order and instead seeks individual, serendipitous experiences. However, while our encounters have taken place with many and varied travelers to Lourdes, who have many different reasons for being there, our findings suggest that they are bonded by an anchor to a common historical and spiritual past that is told and retold through their stories.

These 'Echoes of Bernadette', that are characterized by their themes that comprise 'lived connections', 'encounters', 'visual' imagery and 'curative' content, reverberate through the years, across spiritual and touristic divides, to bring together a wide array of pilgrims. Collectively they provide an authentic link to a common 'truth', or a believed truth, that moves the act of pilgrimage beyond the postmodernistic pursuit of the individual and legitimizes itself in the acknowledgement of the classical spiritual message of the Church.

In contrast to the Turnerian viewpoint, this study finds that the issues of contested space and Church control seldom feature as a problematic issue in the utterances of spiritual or secular visitors to Lourdes. The rigors of the formal itinerary are recognized, but they are either endured or shunned, according to the needs and capabilities of the individual. Consequently, they do not appear to be 'landmarks of meaning' but instead should perhaps be considered to be 'hallmarks of authenticity' that underpin the sociohistorical 'truth' of the site. Those who successfully navigate the contested spaces, and witness or interact in encounters that thematically characterize the events that surrounded St Bernadette, appear to be partaking of a pilgrimage that culminates in an authentic liminoid experience. In crossing this threshold, they assume new roles and become storytellers themselves and thereby perpetuate the telling and retelling of meaningful experiences (Damari and Mansfield, 2016). Thus, we proffer a contribution to the theory of pilgrimage and a consequent neoteric perspective for religious tourism research by declaring that it must recognize that it may be enacted in a post-postmodern duality that accepts the freedom of the individual but recognizes their need for experiences that are grounded in a sociohistorical 'truth'.

It is difficult, if not entirely improper, to consider the Church's control of Lourdes as a form of touristic management but, like della Dora (2012), this research also points to the importance of the social spaces that permit the telling and retelling of deeply meaningful experiences that, in turn, become the trappings of meaningful visits for others. Those that manage the physical

711 space in order to protect its spiritual integrity may only be envisaging one dimension of the
712 liminoid effect of Lourdes. In spite of the 'plastic figurines' (see Swanson and Timothy, 2012),
713 liminoid experiences can and do occur within the seemingly, but not necessarily, contested
714 spaces and places that surround the spiritual epicenter of Lourdes. This poses a dilemma that
715 has been broached at other religious sites that also have touristic attraction (see for example
716 Ballantyne, Hughes and Bond, 2016; Hughes, Bond and Ballantyne, 2013).

717 Just as the extant literature has recognized the movement of 'the pilgrim' toward 'the tourist',
718 our research has also pointed out that 'the tourist' may also move toward 'the pilgrim'.
719 Therefore, just as pilgrims and tourists are found to be sensitive to one another's needs, so
720 should the providers of religious pilgrimages and tourism services recognize that their potential
721 roles and functions may overlap considerably. For example, this could manifest in the provision
722 of spaces where the telling and retelling of stories may be actively invited. A better
723 understanding of how pilgrims, in their many guises, navigate theses spaces and places would
724 provide the spiritual guardians and tourist managers of Lourdes with valuable information
725 about how to best serve their needs. Information about the location and movement of those
726 embarking upon pilgrimages could enable local tourism service providers to maximize the
727 utilization of their resources in response to cyclic and sporadic demands.

728 While Bosangit, Hibbert and McCabe (2015) found that social media facilitates the capture and
729 sharing of meaningful experiences, our work proffers that messages that are imbued with a
730 deep sense of the sociohistorical authenticity of the site will resonate more deeply with its
731 audience. This comprises dimensions such as the 'Echoes of Bernadette' that we have
732 identified and the 'mini-miracles' that are also found to be important in constructing individual
733 meaning of pilgrimage (Bosangit, Higgins and McCabe, 2015). While the production of such
734 social media materials is largely undertaken by visiting individuals and therefore outside the
735 control of any organization, the providers of religious pilgrimages and tourism services could
736 utilize such elements of those materials that represent the individualistic experiences but are
737 rooted in the authentic history of the site in their own media and representations.

738 This study has some limitations. Firstly, the research is bound by the physical and metaphysical
739 limits of Lourdes. While this does permit the investigation of religious and secular visitors, the
740 conclusions are not necessarily generalizable to other pilgrimage or tourist destinations.
741 Secondly, the research methods employed, while providing rich data that are not readily
742 available through techniques that draw upon larger samples of the population, are inherently
743 capable of reinterpretation. Although every effort has been made to confirm the findings, and

744 they do in part resemble the findings of other studies (see for example Bosangit, Hibbert and
745 McCabe, 2015), the conclusions may be confirmed by examining more accounts of Lourdes
746 visitors.

747 Future research should acknowledge the insight that a post-postmodern perspective is capable
748 of bringing to our understanding of religious pilgrimage, and indeed, non-religious pilgrimage.
749 Similar work should be undertaken to explore the significance of 'authenticity' among religious
750 pilgrims' construction of meaning at other significant sites and among targeted pilgrim
751 demographics. By extension, similar examinations could be made of more touristic
752 destinations. In particular, useful insight could be gained into consumption practices through
753 exploring the importance of 'authenticity' and through analysis of 'big data' and geolocation
754 data about pilgrim movement and consumption patterns.

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